

Romans 8:6-11

⁶Now, the way the sinful flesh thinks results in death, but the way the spirit thinks results in life and peace. ⁷For the mind-set of the sinful flesh is hostile to God, since it does not submit to God's law, and in fact, it cannot. ⁸Those who are in the sinful flesh cannot please God. ⁹But you are not in the sinful flesh but in the spirit, if indeed God's Spirit lives in you. And if someone does not have the Spirit of Christ, that person does not belong to Christ. ¹⁰But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, but your spirit is alive because of righteousness. ¹¹And if the Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, the one who raised Christ from the dead will also make your mortal bodies alive through his Spirit, who is dwelling in you.

Sermon for Festival of Pentecost, May 31, 2020 St. Paul's Green Garden, MI

Text: Romans 8:6-11

Theme: **"We Belong to God by the Spirit's Work"**

In the name of our Lord Jesus, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Christian symbols help remind us in pictures of some of the attributes and qualities of our God. These symbols also help remind us of certain truths about our God. The **hand** reaching down from heaven reminds us that God the Father created us and still preserves us, by reaching down his hand to give us everything we have and need. The symbol of the manger reminds us that our Savior, the Son of God was born into our world in humble circumstances; and we see the cross that reminds us our Lord Jesus suffered and died to pay for our sins. These symbols remind us of the activity and truth about God the Father and God the Son.

In addition we experience the blessings of God the Father each day in the clothing we wear, the food we eat and the homes we live in because we know all these things come from him. In scripture we read about everything that Jesus did while he was on earth; his ministry and the sights and sounds of his suffering, death AND resurrection.

We also have symbols that remind us of the activity of and truths about the Holy Spirit. But so often it seems much more difficult for us to get a picture in our minds of just what it is the Holy Spirit does for us. We see and understand what God the Father and God the Son do for us. But so often we forget and don't really realize what the Holy Spirit does for us each day. Earlier in this service we heard of Holy Spirit coming to the disciples at Pentecost and resting on them in the form of tongues of flame. They suddenly had the ability to

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speak in foreign languages they had never learned. They were suddenly bold where they had been fearful and timid before. But all those things happened AFTER the disciples had come to faith. It was a special anointing of the Spirit.

When the apostle Paul explains the work of the Holy Spirit to the Roman Christians he takes us back to the beginnings of the Spirit's work within us. He tells us we belong to God by the Spirit's work. He creates faith in us; He empowers us to do good works; He will raise us from the dead.

I have always felt that one of my biggest challenges in teaching confirmation classes is to make the work of the Holy Spirit real for the students. But this is true, anytime we are teaching about the Spirit. Perhaps this is true because the Spirit's work takes place inside us. We don't really see the Spirit's work with our eyes. But the solemn truth is that we could not even have life with our God if it were not for the work of the Holy Spirit. He creates faith in our hearts. Paul teaches us this in a simple statement that affects both our life and our death: **“Now, the way the sinful flesh thinks results in death, but the way the spirit thinks results in life and peace.”**

The mind of sinful man is death. Paul means that when we are born, we have no relationship with God. Our whole mindset is a desire to serve ourselves and our own selfish desires. Everything we do, everything we think and say is directed toward our own ambitions—it's all about what I want. That is sin because it excludes God. Sin leads only to death. This is simple truth. When we are born, our mind is full of nothing but sin. **“For the mind-set of the sinful flesh is hostile to God.”** When God calls ‘murder’ wrong my sinful nature may agree but it will not agree with God's reason for calling murder wrong. My sinful nature will only call it wrong because it does not want another person to murder me. God says murder is wrong because HE is the one who calls murder wrong, since He gives the gift of life. So our natural condition is still sin; we do not belong to God. In such a condition we have no hope for anything but death. Paul says the body is dead because of sin. We experience the death of our body because we are born sinful and we continue to sin. Death is a natural consequence of sin. Even that little twinge of hatred towards the person who wronged you, even that faint desire to get revenge that crops up again and again in our hearts—even if we never act on it is still sin. God says even our sinful desires are offenses against him. In such a condition we believe we belong to ourselves and not God—that brings death.

But this is where the Holy Spirit does his work and changes everything. The Holy Spirit works powerfully through the Word of God and the Sacrament

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of Holy Baptism. He breaks through and overcomes the stubborn sinful nature. He causes us to be born again; actually he brings forth the birth of the new man within us. So Paul draws this contrast in the life of the Christian: **your body is dead because of sin, but your spirit is alive because of righteousness.** He means our bodies will still die because we sin, but we are truly alive because the Holy Spirit has brought us to a saving faith. We believe that even though we have sinned Jesus has paid for our sins by his death and gives us life through his resurrection. In this condition we belong to God—it happens through the work of the Holy Spirit.

What is more, by faith we know we belong to God. No longer is our mind hostile to God. When we have faith we want to live to please God. Then we see how our sins offend God and we plead daily for our Lord's forgiveness through Jesus.

Because of everything Jesus did God calls us his own. This happens because of the work of the Holy Spirit. We can never fully grasp the importance of this blessing. It means we never have to doubt we belong to God. When you sin and Satan reminds you again and again that sin brings God's punishment, remember God's Word tells you the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin. The Holy Spirit causes you to remember those comforting words. Or when a certain trial comes to your life and you are tempted to think that God does not love you, remember God's Word tells you he disciplines those he loves. The Holy Spirit causes you to remember how those words apply to you, because you belong to God. The Spirit works that kind of faith in you. You see, the Spirit and his power did not just work 2000 years ago at Pentecost. He works in YOUR life every day. His work is not only to comfort you, though we know Jesus calls him the Comforter. His work in you also affects your actions. By his power the Spirit empowers you to do good works.

From many of the things Jesus tells us we understand that good works come from faith—good works are a product of our faith. Jesus said, "*I am the vine you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bring forth much fruit, and by those works you show you are my disciple.*" It is obvious from what Jesus says that good works are actions and words that please God. But we can only do works that are good and pleasing to God by faith. Listen to Paul again: **Those who are in the sinful flesh cannot please God.** Paul is talking about people in whom the Holy Spirit has not worked faith. When the sinful nature controls a person, his mind is hostile to God. He does

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not love God and rejects God's love for him. So anything he does is directed toward his own desires, ambition, and toward anything he considers good for himself.

But it is very different for the person who belongs to God, because the Holy Spirit has brought him or her to faith. “ **But you are not in the sinful flesh but in the spirit, if indeed God's Spirit lives in you.**” What Paul wants us to understand is, since we are controlled by the Spirit of God, not only does the sinful nature not control us, but our works are also pleasing to God, just as ripe fruit is pleasing to the farmer when he finds it on the plants he has raised. When the Holy Spirit causes you to be born again and the Spirit controls your heart he also controls your actions. When your actions come from your heart of faith they are pleasing to God.

Let's look at it once again from the perspective of the person who has no faith. He cannot please God because he is filthy with sin. Suppose you accidentally dump coffee grounds on your clean kitchen floor. So you grab any old rag and it turns out to be pretty filthy with dirt from previous use. You do the best you can but you just can't get the floor clean again because the rag didn't start out clean. In fact, you just end up spreading the dirt around and making things worse.

But in the same situation if you tried to clean up those coffee grounds with a clean rag you could truly clean the floor because the rag started out clean in the first place. This is how the unbeliever is unable to please God even if he does something that looks good on the outside. It is not pleasing to God because his heart is still filthy with sin on the inside. Yet the believer can do even the smallest act of love and it is pleasing to God. Paul says, we should know this and believe that our works are pleasing to God because we belong to Him through the powerful work of the Holy Spirit.

The faith the Spirit creates in us, to believe we belong to God, Paul also says, brings us life and peace. It is not our works that bring us life and peace, notice—it is the Holy Spirit who brings us to faith, who points us to God's truth in his word that brings us life and peace. Jesus won life for us, and God's assurance of his truth brings us peace of mind that God calls us his children, that God has written our names in the book of life in heaven. So you can do any and every good work God asks of you without the fear. There is nothing have to do to make sure you get to heaven. You have heaven. The Holy Spirit assures you of this. You belong to God. You can do your works free from obligation or duty. You can do them freely because you know you belong to

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your God. You can do them from now until the day you die and be assured that the same Spirit who has been with you in life is also with you in death. He will raise our dead bodies to life on the last day.

He will do this because he was right there on Easter to raise Jesus' body from the grave. You know how those women felt early on Easter morning. They were sure Jesus was dead. And it is true—his body WAS dead. It seems all they could think about was his physical life. Everything he had taught them about their life with God and how he is one with the Father, that he has everlasting life and those who believe in him have everlasting life, and yet when he died they seemingly could not look beyond his dead body. None of them could. Paul does not want us to make that mistake. He wants us to know that when we die, while our souls and bodies will be separated for a short time, on the last day, the Holy Spirit will be right there to raise our bodies, even if we have been dead for hundreds of years and our bodies have decayed.

Paul tells us why we can have that kind of confidence. **And if the Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, the one who raised Christ from the dead will also make your mortal bodies alive through his Spirit, who is dwelling in you.** Paul has already taught us that we can have absolute confidence that the Holy Spirit lives in us because he has created faith in us. So here, when we hear the word “if” Paul really means “if” in the sense of “Since.” Again, he wants to give us confidence in the Holy Spirit's power to raise us from the dead. Since the Holy Spirit lives in you by faith, have complete confidence that this same Spirit will raise your body from the grave at the last day. He raised Jesus who paid for your sins. Since you believe in Jesus and his forgiveness your heart and mind are no longer hostile to God. Have complete confidence that the Spirit WILL raise you from the dead because he loves you and lives in you.

Remember those women and the other believers who could only think about Jesus' dead body. The angels told them, don't look for the living among the dead. Don't you think about the fact that your body may be dead for a long time before Jesus comes again. It won't matter, because we have God's promised through his inspired writer: the Holy Spirit WILL raise you from the grave. You don't need to have any anxiety about it; you never need to doubt that truth. It is clear that you belong to God because of the Spirit's work.

One other truth Paul wants us to understand. Since the Holy Spirit has given us life by creating faith in our hearts, we don't need to doubt his power to give life to our physical bodies. If the Spirit can give life to us by causing us to

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be born again by the power of God's Word, something we cannot see with our eyes, the Spirit can also bring our bodies to life, something we CAN see. God can do all things, yes, God the Holy Spirit, too.

So when we think of everything God has done for us, don't think only of the things we can see: food, clothing, home, family, job, transportation and everything else he gives us that we can see. And think even beyond what Jesus did for us when he sacrificed his life on the cross. Think of the work of the Spirit. He gives you faith to believe what Jesus did. He gives you the desire to show your faith by your good works that honor him. And when the last day comes he will bring your body and soul back together again to live with him forever. Then you and I will see with our own eyes that we belong to God because of the Spirit's work in us. Amen.